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## Women At/On the Ballot: Examining the Effects of Tokenism and Quotas

Principal Investigators: Christina Xydias

By 2006, about 40 countries had legislated or constitutionally mandated gender quotas for candidates running for seats in the national legislature, and many more political parties had self-imposed such rules.

Proponents of quotas hail this trend, arguing they are necessary to achieve truly democratic forms of representation. Others, though, charge that any form of quotas conflicts with the basic tenets of liberal democracy.

All too absent from the debate is an understanding of if and how quotas actually change political outcomes. Christina Xydias aims to fill this gap by investigating whether female legislators pursue different policy agendas than their male counterparts, and if so, under what circumstances?

To gain a better understanding of how quotas work in a variety of settings, Xydias performed a comparative analysis of quotas in Greece, Germany, and France, paying particular attention to the phenomenon of tokenism, and how it varies across nations.

Tokenism exists when a few female legislators are elected, giving the illusion that women's interests are represented while the small size of the female delegation in the overall legislature prevents any actual change in policy.

A grant from the Mershon Center supported two legs of Xydias's research: a trip to Greece in September 2007 and travels in Germany in November.

Xydias arrived in Greece on the tail of two unexpected events: a national emergency triggered by rampant wild fires, and a decision by the prime minister to call parliamentary elections six months ahead of schedule.



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While these events significantly complicated her plans to interview legislators, they helped her identify a critical oversight in studies of women's representation.

Because most researchers focus on agenda-setting, they fail to take a system-wide approach that examines how events that are unrelated to the number and identities of female legislators make it more or less likely that women's issues will be viable topics of debate.

The agenda-setting perspective assumes relative political stability, while the frantic political environment in Greece shows how unrelated events can make it impossible for female legislators, no matter how numerous, to create space for their issues.

The remainder of her Mershon funds took Xydias to Berlin, where she interviewed members from four of the five major political parties. Her interviews identified patterns that varied by party affiliation and gender, which will feature prominently in her dissertation.

She also accessed stenographed copies of Bundestag plenary debates dating back to 1976 that are unavailable in the United States. Xydias is now able to code and analyze the debate content to more rigorously test the patterns identified in her interviews.

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